DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 146 503 CG 011 935

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TITLE Development, Implementation and Evaluation of a Competency Based Program in Counselor Education.
PUB DATE [73]
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Association of Behavior Analysis (3rd, Chicago, Illinois, May 14-17, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counselor Certification; *Counselor Qualifications; *Counselor Training; Evaluation Methods; *Performance Based Education; *Professional Education; Program Evaluation

ABSTRACT

This article describes the development, implementation, and evaluation of a competency based, criterion-referenced masters degree counselor education program. It delineates the program's philosophy; the procedures for establishing the exit competencies; task analyses for developing courses and field experiences; the assessment of students' competencies; and context, input, process and output evaluation which have taken place since the program's initiation. (Author)

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Development, Implementation and Evaluation of a Competency Based Program in Counselor Education

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The purpose of this paper is to describe the process of developing, implementing and evaluating a competency based graduate (MS) program in counselor education.

Program Description:

The program in counselor education at Florida International University consists of 90 quarter hours of credit. The first 45 hours are largely generic in nature and lead to the development of competencies in individual and group counseling, and other social and behavioral change techniques; program organization and evaluation; and coordination of school and community-centered interventions.

Training patterns are differentiated during the last 45 hours and lead to specialization in the following areas: a) counseling in the elementary schools; b) counseling at the secondary school level; c) counseling in higher education; d) vocational counseling; and e) community counseling.

The program, set within a total pupil personnel training program, shares training resources with a program in school psychology as well as a masters level program for the training of diagnostic teachers. Through this interface, common skills in human relations, consultation behavioral strategies and the development of appropriate educational environments are demonstrated.

Initial decisions on the competencies to be required of students were made during 1971-72 prior to the opening of the University. These competencies were derived from explicit concepts of role behaviors as expressed in the standards of various professional organizations and in

the research literature. That same year a Community Advisory Council was established to react to the competencies specified in the training program.

During the next four academic years, no formal adisory group existed for the counselor education program. However, continual feedback on the validity of our training goals was obtained from the number of supervisors who worked with our students in the field experiences and internships. Quarterly course and instructor evaluations were completed by students to obtain periodic data on the effectiveness of the modules in the overall program. The data obtained from these evaluations was used to facilitate communication between student body and the professors for program revisions.

Program Philosophy:

The term "competency based" includes both knowledge and skill acquisition. Such a program is expressed in terms of behavioral objectives and is evaluated by assessing the overt skill performance by the students. However, the major program goal of a competency based program, like ours, is to produce people who can work with other people using specific skills and behavior. Therefore, the ultimate criterion of effectiveness must be stated in terms of what happens to the clients of students who have completed the training program, Kennedy (1973), Gay (1973) and Elam (1971).

Instructional Process:

The common starting point for developing our competency based instructional program is simply reformulating the competencies arrived and validated by the staff in terms of courses. These competencies are rewritten as specific behavioral objectives for each course.

Instructional modules are used to facilitate the learner's demonstration of objectives which were specified in the design phase of development. Each module includes a clear statement of the rationale for the course's objectives, a set of required objectives and enabling activities which specify instructional alternatives for attaining modules competencies.

According to the basic philosophy of competency based programs, it does not make any difference how long it would take a student to complete a given learning module or the entire training program. Field work and other kinds of laboratory activities are necessary for purposes of skill attainment. Field experiences have the great advantage of giving students a taste of the "real world" which cannot be exactly duplicated in classroom simulation. Field placements are mutually advantageous to the training institution and to the institution in which the placement is made. This is especially important if the placement institution plays a significant part in the supervision of the students, which is often necessary due to limited manpower at the training institution.

Assessment of student's progress in a competency based program would tend to emphasize measures of client behavior change in counseling outcome assessment. In addition, the student's performance in interaction with clients would be observed to determine whether or not adequate attention was being given to the client. Reliability of observation is usually obtained by using clinical instructors to rate students' performance based on course competencies or goals.

Evaluation of Program

Competency based, criterion referenced programs of training present a unique opportunity for the application of evaluation strategies. Unlike more traditional models of instruction, these programs clearly define training objectives, identify behavioral objectives, and commit themselves to specific instructional resources and experiences. Such programs are committed not only to ongoing evaluation of their product (the graduates), but also to a continued precise re-evaluation of training competencies, behavioral objectives and resources. Such re-examination involves a continuing monitoring of context, input process and product variables.

They provide a needs assessment, information on utilization of resources, periodic feedback and a measurement of attainment. These four areas are the necessary elements of the overall evaluation strategy. It is through the examination of context information that the relevant current environment is defined, actual conditions are delineated and needs are assessed. The input information provides data used to determine how to utilize resources to realize project objectives. It is through such input data that the strategies for achieving project objectives and the designs for implementation are derived. Process information becomes available once implementation of the program has begun. Such information provides feedback necessary to the persons involved in actual implementation of the program and procedures. The data serves to detect and predict defects in procedural design or implementation, provides information for program related decisions, and records procedures as they unfold. The fourth source of information is the product data. Such data is used to measure and interpret attainments during the project/program as well as at the end of the cycle. This information provides data used to decide to

continue, change, terminate or modify activities.

Stufflebeam (Stufflebeam, 1968, Stufflebeam and Guba, 1966, Stufflebeam et al., 1971) espouses a decision-management-oriented approach to educational evaluation. This approach is widely known as the CIPP (Context, Input, Process and Product) evaluation model. Within this model, "Evaluation is the process of delineating, obtaining and providing useful information for judging decision-alternatives" (Stufflebeam, 1968). In applying this definition of evaluation, the following points must be emphasized:

1) The purpose of evaluation is decision making. Therefore, the information it provides must be useful to decision makers.
2) Evaluation is a continuing process; that is, it is ongoing and cyclic and must be implemented through a systematic program.
3) The methodology of the evaluation rests on delineating, obtaining and providing information.
4) The delineating and providing steps are activities requiring collaboration between evaluator and decision maker. The obtaining is largely a technical step executed mainly by the evaluator.

Conclusions

Perhaps the most difficult task facing the staff during this process is the integration of accountabilities to create a program that is most responsive to the audiences that are affected by it. Implicit in all of this are the value systems of everyone concerned with the program development and implementation. Reporting procedures were established at the end of every quarter for the Input and Process evaluation, where feedback was given to the staff regarding their teaching strategies and

activities. Product evaluation was reported formally to the Accreditation Committee of the Board of Regents.

Changes in education have become a much more frequent reality; however, the results of our evaluations clearly indicate that without a tradition of planned change or systematic inquiry into the effectiveness of new programs, the changes which are occurring in education can be often little more than random adoption of fadish innovations.

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